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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for the selection, training, guidance, supervision, and evaluation of graduate student instructors (GSIs) are provided by the University of California, Berkeley. "Good practices" for departments are identified, including assigning individuals or a committee with the task of selection, training, and supervision of GSIs; developing written policy statements on the rights and responsibilities of faculty members and GSIs and publishing procedures for selecting, rehiring, and promoting GSIs; and making apprentice teaching opportunities available to all graduate students regardless of career goals. Good practices for faculty members are also specified, including: setting up a meeting to discuss the course and the GSI's role before the semester begins; getting GSIs together with past GSIs of the course; and asking GSIs to give brief weekly written reports of any problems students are having in the course. Activities that GSIs can initiate to determine the effectiveness of their instructional methods are described, including index cards, two-minute papers, study groups, oral evaluations, colleague visitation, and videotaping. A form for student evaluation of GSIs is included. (SW)

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[UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY: GOOD PRACTICES IN THE SELECTION, TRAINING, GUIDANCE, AND SUPERVISION OF GRADUATE STUDENTS INSTRUCTORS] and [EVALUATING THE TEACHING OF GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTORS]

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The materials in the Special Collection on the Training of Teaching Assistants were developed through the active efforts of numerous educators who first met at the 1986 National Conference on the Institutional Responsibilities and Responses in the Employment and Education of Teaching Assistants held at the Ohio State University. Assisted by more than 80 individuals, the committee chairs listed below were able to establish the collection which will be developed and maintained by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Higher Education. This arrangement will enable faculty members, faculty developers, administrators, TA supervisors, and graduate teaching assistants to have access to TA training materials produced by institutions across the nation.

Task Force on Establishing a National Clearinghouse of Materials Developed for TA Training

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Good Departmental Practices in the Selection, Training, Guidance, and Supervision of Graduate Student Instructors

The following list of "good practices" can enhance both undergraduate instruction at Berkeley and the development of future college and university teachers. If you would like more information, assistance or materials, please call the Office of Educational Development, 642-6392 (273 Stephens Hall).

IN GENERAL, IT IS A GOOD PRACTICE FOR DEPARTMENTS TO:

- Assign individuals or a committee with primary responsibility for matters related to the selection, training and supervision of graduate student instructors.
- Develop written policy statements on the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of faculty members and GSIs and publish procedures for selecting, rehiring and promoting graduate student instructors. A copy of the criteria and procedures shall be on file with the Graduate Division for public inspection.
- Make apprentice teaching opportunities available to all their graduate students regardless of career goals if possible and practical. If students wish to serve as GSIs but lack the necessary skills, they should be given the chance to develop those skills through departmental and central training programs.
- Hire (and especially rehire) GSIs on the basis of command of both spoken and written English, command of the subject matter and potential or demonstrated teaching ability, rather than on financial need.
- Treat the initial teaching appointment of a student with no previous apprentice teaching experience as a monitored trial with critical feedback to the novice teaching apprentice throughout.
- Provide orientations for new GSIs before they undertake their duties, discussing roles, responsibilities and other issues related to being a GSI.
- Use campus-wide training activities (e.g., Graduate Assembly Orientation conference and Handbook) to supplement (but not replace) their own training efforts.
- Encourage first-year graduate students or new GSIs to serve a period of apprenticeship to experienced GSIs before being given sole responsibility for a section.
- Capitalize on their experienced GSIs by involving them with new GSIs in "buddy" pairings in small group discussions or through written legacies.
- Arrange for apprentice teachers to receive feedback about their teaching (from student questionnaires, videotape, or observations by peers, Master GSIs, or faculty members) during the middle of their first teaching term, in the spirit of improvement.
- Formally evaluate new and experienced GSIs at least once a year through student questionnaires or observation by a faculty member or GSI coordinator. These evaluations are most useful if a faculty member or GSI Coordinator discusses with the GSIs their strengths and weaknesses.

- Employ a "Master GSI" who coordinates GSI activities for large courses with many sections, conducts demonstration classes or orientation sessions for new GSIs, observes and monitors GSI performance and, in general, provides a liaison between GSIs and faculty, in those departments with large numbers of GSIs.

- Offer 300-level courses aimed at demonstrating and perfecting teaching skills, in those departments with large numbers of GSIs.

- Initiate a series of workshops or colloquia on teaching to which GSIs as well as faculty are invited. The OED staff is available to help design and conduct such workshops.

- Involve both faculty and GSIs in designing a departmental GSI training program in order to assure that it will be responsive to the needs of GSIs, faculty, and undergraduate students.

- Identify ways of institutionalizing GSI training so that it is not solely dependent upon the efforts of a single individual (e.g., establishing traditions related to training carried on by the students).

- Focus GSI training first on "here and now" topics and activities which will immediately improve the instruction of undergraduates and give guidance and reassurance to GSIs. Course-based GSI training under the guidance of a faculty member coupled with departmental or Graduate Assembly Orientation workshops can best provide this aspect of training. OED is available to help design such activities.

- Focus GSI training in the "long run" on the goal of developing better college and university teachers in their disciplines. Departmental seminars (in the 300 series) and departmental colloquia can best provide this. OED is available to help design such activities.

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GOOD PRACTICES IN GSI GUIDANCE, TRAINING, AND SUPERVISION

In an important sense, the teaching of large undergraduate courses with GSIs is a special form of team-teaching. As in any team-teaching effort, the success of the course depends on the quality of two-way communication both in the planning and the conduct of the course.

Graduate Student Instructors have repeatedly complained that they do not receive the kinds of guidance and support from faculty members that allow them to do their best and develop as teachers.

The following list of "*good practices*" are recommended for enhancing both undergraduate instruction at Berkeley and the development of future college and university teachers. If you would like more information, assistance, or materials, please call The Office of Educational Development.

IN GENERAL, IT IS GOOD PRACTICE FOR FACULTY MEMBERS TO:

- Set up a meeting to discuss the course and the GSI's role thoroughly before the semester begins (covering such topics as procedures, responsibilities, grading, and best ways of spending time in sections).
- Give GSIs a copy of the course syllabus and readings at least a week before class begins.
- Recommend additional readings on course topics unfamiliar to the GSIs so that GSIs feel comfortable with the material.
- Get GSIs together with those who have been GSIs for the course in previous years, so that new GSIs can benefit from the experience of their predecessors regarding best ways of spending time in sections, chief problems students may experience, ways of stimulating discussion, etc.
- Let GSIs know that instructors are there to provide supervision and guidance both to make the life of the GSI as a novice teacher more rewarding and to see that the learning experience of the undergraduates is the most effective.
- Share anecdotes with GSIs about the problems they experienced when they began to teach and pass along whatever "*tips*" they might have so GSIs do not think that their own anxieties are unique.
- Require GSIs to attend course lectures, so that GSIs know what material has been covered and how, so that they may be better prepared in sections to fill gaps, correct misunderstanding, etc.
- Schedule their own office hours at different times than the GSIs in order to maximize students' opportunities to consult with course staff.
- Ask GSIs to give them brief weekly written reports on any problems the students may be having in the course (e.g. "*List the 1 or 2 things that caused students the most difficulty in class last week.*")
- Get together with GSIs once a week to discuss how the course is going, and what improvements could be made based on their individual observations.
- Get together with GSIs to design course assignments and exams and to develop common criteria for grading, both to improve the course and to give guidance and practice experience to the GSIs.
- Review GSIs comments and/or grades on at least the first set of essays, problem sets, quizzes or lab reports and discuss criteria for grading and the best ways to give students feedback.

IN GENERAL, IT IS GOOD PRACTICE FOR FACULTY MEMBERS TO:

- Ask GSIs weekly to help identify students having difficulty and to give individual help where possible, referring more difficult problems to the instructor.
- Inform GSIs about campus resources for referring students who need tutorial assistance, advice, or counsel beyond that which the GSI qualified to give.
- Encourage GSIs to give the instructor constructive feedback on ways of improving his or her lecture presentation by identifying specific areas to focus on which the faculty member suspects might be weak, e.g. explanations, summaries, blackboard work, speed and tone of voice.
- Give GSIs an opportunity to prepare and deliver a lecture or "*mini lecture*" on a course topic they know well, and then give them constructive feedback on aspects of their presentation, e.g. organization, explanations or examples, speed and tone of voice, use of blackboard, handling of questions, etc.
- Arrange for GSIs to be evaluated by their students (mid-semester and/or at the end of the semester) and discuss the results of these evaluations in ways that will help the GSIs improve their teaching, e.g. giving them concrete suggestions about how they might improve.
- Visit GSI sections at least once during the term and talk with each GSI constructively about his/her strengths and make suggestions for improvement based on the faculty members own teaching experience.
- Set up a schedule of classroom visits so that each GSI is visited by two other GSIs to give each other feedback and "*tips*" for improving specific aspects of their teaching based on their observations and their own experiences. (OED has guidelines for classroom visits).
- Contact the Educational Television and Radio Office and arrange to have someone talk to the GSIs about the opportunities for having their sections videotaped to give them additional feedback on their teaching (the person to contact Ann Juell and the number is 642-2535).
- Inform GSIs of other resources to help them improve their teaching, e.g. departmental orientations, workshop/colloquia, 300 courses, the Graduate Assembly, OED, GSI handbooks, disciplinary journals concerned with teaching, exemplary teachers or experienced GSIs in or outside the department, departmental library or files of materials on teaching in the discipline, other courses on teaching given on campus.
- Treat GSIs as junior colleagues who are hired to help undergraduates to get the best possible education as well as to improve their own teaching skills.

METHODS OF EVALUATING YOUR TEACHING: Tips for Graduate Student Instructors

As a beginning instructor, you may feel that evaluation is the last thing you need to think about. Being prepared for your sections, creating discussion questions, developing good assignments--all these activities may seem more pressing than evaluation. But evaluation can provide you with detailed information that can help you improve your skills in all these areas.

You may tend to associate evaluation with the students' end-of-course questionnaire. While those questionnaires are useful, you shouldn't wait until the end of the term to get feedback from the students you are teaching. Obviously, once the semester is over you can't make changes that will benefit the students who wrote the evaluations. Also, you'll usually find that students' end-of-course comments are too general to give you the specific suggestions you need to improve your teaching.

Here are several activities you can initiate during the semester to find out how effective your methods of instruction are. Some of these techniques are quite simple, a few require planning or technical assistance. Of course, you won't want to use all these techniques in any one course. Experiment with the ones that appeal to you and see which ones provide the most helpful information. If you would like to receive materials or references related to evaluation or teaching, contact the Office of Educational Development (642-6392), 273 Stephens Hall.

Index cards. Several times during the term pass out 3 x 5 cards to your students and ask them to respond to two questions, one on the front of the card, the other on the back. You can pose general questions such as "How are you finding the course?" or "Any questions for changing the course? Any problems?" If you suspect that there is a specific problem, ask about it: "Is the textbook too superficial?" or "Is the pace of the laboratory sessions appropriate for you?"

Question box. Bring a box or a manila envelope to class and ask students to place their unsigned comments, questions, or complaints in it. Their questions will alert you to material they don't understand; clear up any ambiguities or confusion at the next class meeting.

Two-minute papers. At the end of a class, ask your students to write for a minute or two on the following two questions:

What is the most significant thing you learned today?
What question is uppermost in your mind at the end of today's class?

These papers can help you evaluate how well you have conveyed the material. Additionally, your students get practice in organizing their thoughts and writing out their ideas. Their questions might also help you structure the topics for the next section meeting.

Study groups. Encourage your students to form small study groups and to send group representatives to discuss any difficulties or questions with you. Study groups provide students with opportunities to learn from one another and may make it easier for students to seek your help.

Borrow students' class notes. Periodically borrow students' notes and review them to identify problems your students may be having with the material. Of course you'll need to inform your class that you will be doing this and to explain that your purpose is not to 'spy' on them but to discover points of confusion or misunderstanding.

Oral evaluation. Midway through the term, invite a colleague to conduct an oral evaluation with your students. At the beginning of the class, introduce the guest evaluator and then leave the room for twenty minutes. Have the evaluator ask your students to cluster into groups of five or six and to take ten minutes to : (1) select a spokesperson who will also write down the group's comments; (2) name something in the course that they find very helpful or

worthwhile; (3) name something they would like to see changed; (4) suggest how the course could be improved. The evaluator should circulate among the groups as they are working to remind them how much time they have left and to make certain that they are staying with the task. At the end of the ten minutes, the evaluator will ask the spokesperson from each group to report the group's findings, and the evaluator will record the results on the blackboard. When all spokespersons have reported, the evaluator summarizes the points of consensus and asks for clarification on points of disagreement. The evaluator then collects the written comments from the spokespersons, erases the board, and leaves to prepare oral or written summaries to be shared with the instructor later that day.

Colleague visitation. Invite a teaching colleague to observe one of your classes and make suggestions. You'll find visitation most helpful if you inform your colleague of your specific goals for the class meeting or the particular technique you are trying to perfect. Then your colleague can focus his or her observations, which will make the task easier for your colleague and the results more useful for you. Be sure to let your class know that a colleague will be sitting in.

Videotaping. While watching yourself on videotape can be a startling experience, it gives you an excellent opportunity to judge how well you conduct a class: whether you dominate the discussion, whether you allow students enough time to think through questions, whether you maintain adequate eye contact, and so on. To arrange to have your class taped, call the Educational Television Office (642-2535). You'll also be able to arrange for a private viewing of the tape--no one else need see it. The Office of Educational Development will provide observation forms that you might find helpful in reviewing your tape. Again, tell your students beforehand that a particular class session will be taped.

Midsemester written evaluation. Once or twice during the semester hand out a short questionnaire (or write the questions on the board). A sample questionnaire follows this article, and you can duplicate it and give it to your students. If you design your own questions, make sure that the issues posed are ones you can respond to during the term; otherwise your students may develop false expectations about the remainder of the course.

Responding to student feedback. It is important to respond to student feedback quickly and candidly. Once you have gathered students' comments, first review the positive things they have said about the course. Then read carefully their suggestions for improvement, grouping them into three categories: (1) those that you can change this semester (e.g., the turnaround time on homework assignments or quizzes); (2) those that must wait until the next time the course is offered (e.g., changes in the textbook); and (3) those that you either cannot or for pedagogical reasons will not change (e.g., the number of quizzes). At the next class meeting, begin by thanking students for their comments. Clarify any confusions or misunderstandings about your goals and their expectations. Then indicate which of their suggestions you will act upon this term, which must wait until the course is next offered, and which you will not change because of pedagogical reasons. It is important to let students know that what they have said has been read and considered. You will find that students take very seriously the opportunity to give instructors feedback and that your teaching will benefit from using these kinds of evaluation procedures.

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STUDENT DESCRIPTIONS OF GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTORS

Graduate Student Instructor_____ _____Semester, 19___

Department_____ Course Number & Section_____

The following items reflect some of the ways graduate student instructors (GSI) can be described. Please circle the number which indicates the degree to which you feel each item is descriptive of your GSI.

In general your GSI:	Not at all Descriptive				Very Descriptive	Doesn't apply or don't know
1. Appears to have a good knowledge of the subject matter.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
2. Is well-prepared.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
3. Uses class time effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
4. Explains new material clearly.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
5. Has clear objectives for each class session.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
6. Is concerned that students learn the material.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
7. Raises challenging questions or problems for discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
8. Presents clear summaries or reviews of materials covered.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
9. Knows if the class is understanding him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
10. Makes you feel free to ask questions or express ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
11. Is thoughtful and precise in answering questions.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
12. Helps clarify points not understood in lecture.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
13. Is helpful and supportive when you are having difficulty.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
14. Provides useful feedback on exams or assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	( )

	Not at all Descriptive				Very Descriptive	Doesn't apply or don't know
15. Is available to students outside of class.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
16. Seems to enjoy teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	( )
17. Is enthusiastic about the subject.	1	2	3	4	5	( )

Considering both the limitations and possibilities of the subject matter and course, how would you rate the overall teaching effectiveness of this graduate student instructor?

Not at all effective			Moderately effective			Extremely effective
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What comments or suggestions do you have regarding this GSI's teaching effectiveness?

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